Boomtowns

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Background

How did boomtowns come into existence?

Boomtowns emerged as a result of economic booms in the Far West. These economic booms occurred in mineral-rich regions, and settlers quickly flocked over in hopes to gain riches through obtaining precious and selling precious metals. The mining boom period was abrupt-it began it the 1860s and ended in the 1890s.

Were people in the boomtowns successful?

Contrary to most popular belief, a majority of the people who relocated to boomtowns did not flourish financially. It was usually the already economically advantaged who succeeded in boomtowns. First, individual prospectors would exploit the first deposits, and after the surface deposits dwindled, large corporations took over. The large corporations dug deeper into the surface to engage in either lode or quartz mining. Finally, as those deposits eventually dwindled, commercial mining usually continued on a restricted basis, and ranchers and farmers moved in and established a more permanent economy.

What was government like in the boomtowns?

Since the populations of these towns dramatically increased practically over night, there was a lack of proper law enforcement. Boomtowns also seemed to attract "outlaws" and gangs. As a result, vigilante committees emerged from the communities. This seemingly positive process would sometimes become corrupted when criminals secured control of the committees. Even after the creation of a regular government occurred, some vigilantes continued to serve as private law enforcers.

What was life like in the boomtowns?

Relatively few people from boomtowns who were not initially rich "struck it rich." However, there were a lucky few who became wealthy off of a strike and- they are referred to as "bonanza kings". Most men worked arduous jobs in corporate mining. Those who survived the frequent explosions, cave-ins, and fires, had to endure extremely hot conditions with poor ventilation and dusty air.

Ghost Towns

Cultural Impacts

Railroads

The success of a boomtown was completely dependent on whether or not the railroad ran through the area. Travelers not only needed transportion to arrive at the boomtowns, but also transportation to deliver the gold and other mineral goods to the East. Without the railroad, no boomtown could successfully attract settlers and export goods.

Women in Power

There was a significant gender imbalance in the boomtowns of the West. Although this did lead to a significant increase in prostitutes, it also held some positive effects. Most married women cared to domestic needs, while most single women resorted to prostitution due to the alarming number of single men. For some women, an extra income was necessary, so they took on jobs as cooks, tavern keepers, or laundresses. Although not derived from a passion for equality, women gained much power and respect through the evolution of boomtowns.

Are any boomtowns still around today?